

# AMERICAN "LOW POSTURE" POLICY TOWARD INDONESIA IN THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE 1965 "COUP"<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Bunnell

## Introduction

This article seeks to contribute to the reconstruction, explanation, and evaluation of the Johnson Administration's response to President Sukarno's radicalization of Indonesia's domestic politics and foreign policy in the first nine months of 1965 leading up to the abortive "coup" on October 1, 1965.

The focus throughout is on both the thinking and the politics of what can be termed "the 1965 Indonesia policy group."<sup>2</sup> That unofficial group was the informal constellation of US officials both in Indonesia (in the Embassy-based country team)<sup>3</sup> and in Washington (in the

---

<sup>1</sup>This article has enjoyed a long, troubled odyssey. Growing out of intermittent research on American-Indonesian relations dating back to my doctoral dissertation field research in Jakarta in 1963-1965, the substance of the article, including its primary conclusions, was presented in papers at the August 1979 Indonesian Studies Conference in Berkeley and the March 1980 International Studies Association Conference in Los Angeles. I am indebted to the American Philosophical Society, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the Vassar College Faculty Research Committee for grants in 1976-1979 which facilitated the brunt of the archival and interview research undergirding the article. The Vassar Mellon Fund also contributed to my 1981-1982 sabbatical in Jakarta where I sought with very limited success to explore Indonesian sources.

<sup>2</sup>Space constraints forced the elimination from this article of a long section entitled "The Politics of the 1965 Indonesian Policy Group: Individuals, Factions, Agencies, and Influence." Salient points are, however, incorporated into footnotes below.

<sup>3</sup>For the operation of the country team in Jakarta in the 1960s, see the testimony of both former Ambassador Howard Jones and Deputy Chief of Mission Francis Galbraith, who served under both Jones and his successor, from 1963 through the late fall of 1965. See also H.W. Brands, "The Limits of Manipulation: How the United States Didn't Topple Sukarno," *Journal of American History* 76, 3 (December 1989): 788. It is, however, naive to conclude that the accountability of the CIA station to either Washington or the ambassador was as automatic or complete as Brands contends. The most thoroughly documented organizational history of the CIA concluded that in Washington only a "limited number of DDP projects were subject to external authorization." In the field, despite Presidential initiatives in the 1960s to improve State-CIA coordination, the ambassador had no direct authority over the Station Chief. "... In each case, the kind of information an ambassador received was depen-

major agencies of the foreign policy community)<sup>4</sup> who functioned as the chief architects and managers of US policy on Indonesia.

This partial reconstruction, based primarily on American government documents and interview testimony,<sup>5</sup> demonstrates that the substance of US overt policy was one of largely consistent restraint in responding to President Sukarno's often provocative and hostile "march to the left." Characterized as "stolid acquiescence" by one of its architects,<sup>6</sup> the policy is seen here as a remarkably restrained strategy of "low posture" in contrast to the concurrent escalation of the American war in Vietnam. Rooted in a sober reading of the limits of US influence over both Sukarno and the Indonesian army, the restraint evident in US overt policy thinking and behavior probably also informed American covert policy and actions. It is, however, premature for any analyst to render a final judgement on the CIA's role in the October coup plot, or in other clandestine activities both before and after the coup, including the tragic massacre of about half a million alleged Communists in the fall of 1965.<sup>7</sup> Few documents relevant to CIA activities have yet been declassified and censors have been skillful in "sanitizing" ostensibly declassified NSC staff memoranda. Conclusive judgement must therefore await the US government release of relevant classified documents, such as the complete file of the CIA's Jakarta station, and also the Indonesian government's granting of access to participants, such as Colonel Latief, who are still imprisoned.

#### *The Impact of the Vietnam War on US Indonesia Policy*

Explaining fully why the United States stuck to a policy of restraint is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the paper's heavy attention to the bureaucratic politics of policy formulation does highlight relevant factors conducive to sustaining a non-interventionist policy. Among these, one of the most notable was the impact of Vietnam on the decision-making process. The continuing priority of the top foreign policy officials throughout 1965 was the series of decisions to escalate the American war in Vietnam—in February to initiate

---

dent on his preference for being informed, his disposition to assert his prerogatives, and his relationship with the CIA Station Chief. . . ." See US Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Final Report No.94-755, "History of the Central Intelligence Agency," in *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1976, pp.1-108 (henceforth Church Committee, *History of the CIA*), especially pp. 70-72.

<sup>4</sup>For a lucid introduction to the personalities that shaped policy in this period see Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Kennedy Administration* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967). As both a political scientist and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, 1961-1964, Hilsman provides an unusual combination of conceptual analysis and informed—and passionate—memoir. Also see David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), for provocative sociological and psychological profiles of the top foreign policy officials in the Johnson administration.

<sup>5</sup>For the interviews I am indebted to over 75 former American officials, some of whom have generously talked to me several times over the past two decades. For the documents I am forever grateful to the friendly and effective cooperation of the archivists at the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Libraries. Especially notable was the assistance of William Moss and Megan Floyd Desnoyers at Kennedy and Martin Elzy and David Humphrey at Johnson in advising me on the procedures for petitioning under E.O. 11652 (complement to the Freedom of Information Act) for the declassification of documents relevant to this study. I am also thankful to the several policy officials in Washington who had the onerous duty of determining which portions of the Indonesia policy material could be released.

<sup>6</sup>James Thomson, White House NSC Asian specialist in 1964-1965, employs this term in his essay: "The Nineteen Sixties as History: A Preliminary Overview," in *American-East Asian Relations: A Survey*, ed. Ernest R. May and James C. Thomson, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 390-409.

<sup>7</sup>Such premature absolution of the CIA is provided by Stephen Rosenfeld in his column: "Indonesia 1965: Year of U.S. Irrelevance," *Washington Post*, July 20, 1990. Rosenfeld bases his conclusions on Brands, "The Limits of Manipulation," pp. 785-808.

regular bombing of North Vietnam; in March to dispatch the first American ground troops; in July to deploy 50,000 troops and to commit to an open-ended build-up to over 200,000 over ensuing months.<sup>8</sup> Those momentous political-military steps on Vietnam inevitably produced among the principal decision makers—down at least to the level of assistant secretary—a tendency to neglect less urgent problems in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia policy. The classic case of this phenomenon was the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William Bundy, who came to be known as “the Vietnam desk officer.”<sup>9</sup> That in turn at least partly explains why Bundy effectively delegated prime responsibility for Indonesia policy to FE’s Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, David Cuthell, and other “FE experts.”<sup>10</sup> A similar pattern also developed in the CIA’s Deputy Directorate of Plans (DDP)—the clandestine services, as distinguished from the intelligence analysis (DDI) side of the CIA. There DDP-FE Director William Colby found himself, because of his absorption with Vietnam, relying to an extraordinary degree for Indonesian expertise on his deputy, Joe Smith, who had just returned in the fall of 1964 from successive assignments as Station Chief in Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>11</sup> In a roughly parallel fashion, McGeorge Bundy, the President’s National Security Advisor, found his deep engagement with Vietnam required that he rely heavily on James Thomson, the Harvard-trained East Asian historian who had primary responsibility on the NSC staff for covering Indonesia in 1965.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, as illustrated in most of the episodes presented below, preoccupation at the top with Vietnam created an unusual opportunity throughout the foreign policy community for middle-echelon officials, especially those with recognized area expertise and bureaucratic political skills, to shape Indonesia policy. In short, the remarkable restraint in the official US response to Sukarno’s 1965 shift to the left is, in part, a function of what might be called “the benign neglect” of Indonesia by top officials “swallowed up by Vietnam.”<sup>13</sup>

### *The Genesis of the Low Posture Policy*

Throughout the Kennedy Administration and through the first year of the Johnson Administration, Washington had, with growing ambivalence, endorsed the strategy advocated by the veteran American Ambassador in Jakarta, Howard Jones, who had fought steadfastly throughout his seven-year tenure for “a policy of actively trying to influence Sukarno,” here labeled the “accommodationist” or “Jonesian” policy after its prime spokesman and symbol.<sup>14</sup> In the face of Sukarno’s launching of a confrontation policy of

<sup>8</sup>George Herring, *America’s Longest War* (New York: Knopf, 1985), esp. pp. 127-43. For a more thorough account with analysis of both Vietnamese and American perspectives, see George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

<sup>9</sup>See *inter alia* Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, pp. 369-400.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with William Bundy in May 1970 and subsequent interviews, especially in August 1978, with his subordinates, including most notably Marshall Green, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State FE; David Cuthell, Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs (SWP) from the summer of 1964; Francis Underhill, widely respected Deputy Director of SWP; and Edward Ingraham, Indonesian desk officer.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with William Colby and Joseph Smith in 1978.

<sup>12</sup>Interviews with Chester Cooper, Thomson’s senior colleague on NSC Asian staff, in June 1970 and May 1981. Interview with James Thomson in February 1969, and “James Thomson Oral History” on deposit in the LBJ Library.

<sup>13</sup>This is Chester Cooper’s phrase.

<sup>14</sup>The prominence of Jones’ role is widely acknowledged by both his supporters and critics. For Jones’ own detailed memoir and defense, see Howard Palfrey Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971). For a sympathetic treatment of Jones’ role in the Kennedy years, see the memoir of his ally at the time, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, esp. pp. 361-412.

subversion against the British-designed Federation of Malaysia in September 1963, doubts about Jonesian accommodation of Sukarno developed within his own embassy as well as in Washington.<sup>15</sup> When the United States, in July 1964, publicly pledged its support to the Malaysian Federation, Sukarno redirected his radical nationalism at the United States.<sup>16</sup> The ensuing anti-American campaign in the fall of 1964, coupled with a militant drive by the Communist Party (PKI) to encourage peasant seizures of land in unilateral implementation of existing agrarian reform legislation, crystallized the opposition to Jones' policy.<sup>17</sup> Informally led by David Cuthell, and his deputy at the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, Francis Underhill, this opposition enjoyed strong support from Vietnam-obsessed higher officials in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Assistant Secretary William Bundy and Deputy Assistant Secretary Marshall Green.<sup>18</sup> Outside of FE the opposition had the active backing of long-standing critics of Jones in both the analysis and covert action branches of the CIA. And, with the escalation of Sukarno's shifts to the left at the turn of the year, these FE experts gradually won the backing of Jones' erstwhile champions on the strategically placed White House NSC staff, James Thomson and Chester Cooper. Rejecting Jones' "coddling" of Sukarno as futile and counter-productive, Bundy, Green, Cuthell, and others called for a "low posture" policy. This entailed an end to Jones' initiatives and a sharp reduction of the US aid program in Indonesia. At the same time, however, the "low posture" advocates strongly embraced Ambassador Jones' counsel against any hostile or provocative action against the volatile Sukarno. They also sought within the limits of low posture to maintain, as Jones had, the closest possible link with the anti-Communist army.

This policy did, indeed, seem to be the most effective way to play what Assistant Secretary William Bundy described as an "eight-high hand."<sup>19</sup> While a low-posture policy can not be credited with causing the ultimate victory of the army in Indonesia's power struggle, it probably facilitated that outcome. And, more important, it probably deflected forms of intervention which might well have been counterproductive and have contributed to the defeat of the army. Whether this overt strategy functioned also as a cover for significant covert actions will remain unclear until appropriate documents are declassified. What is already clear, however, is that, despite its acuteness in perceiving the political limits of US power, it often proved indifferent to the moral limits of that power.

<sup>15</sup>For the most authoritative and comprehensive multi-actor study of confrontation, see J.A.C. Mackie, *Konfrontasi: The Indonesia-Malaysia Dispute, 1963-1966* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>16</sup>For Ambassador Jones, Washington's decision in July 1964 not only to reaffirm support for Malaysian independence, but to begin a program of military assistance to Malaysia was an undue provocation of Sukarno that triggered his subsequent shift to escalating anti-Americanism. See Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, pp. 340-51.

<sup>17</sup>For the coalescing of opposition to Jones' "accommodationism" in the summer and fall of 1964, compare the treatment in *ibid.*, pp. 340-51 with the views of one of Jones' leading critics at that time, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary for FE, Marshall Green, who would succeed Jones as ambassador in July 1965. See Robert Martens, "A Conversation with Marshall Green: Nudging the Tiller—Indonesia Reverses Course," *Foreign Service Journal*, December 1987, pp. 21-27. Henceforth cited as "Green's Oral History," which is on deposit at the Foreign Service History Center at George Washington University in Washington, DC. For two fine analyses of the evolution of this "soft-line"–"hard-line" debate, see the interview-based study by Jack Sullivan, "The United States and the New Order in Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, American University, 1969) and the more extensive examination based mainly on declassified documents, in Edward Lee, "American Policy toward Indonesia, 1963-1965" (MA thesis, Cornell University, 1980).

<sup>18</sup>The reconstruction of the bureaucratic political struggle between Jones and his critics offered below is based mainly on my interpretive synthesis of data gleaned from multiple interviews with officials who served in 1964-1965 in positions in FE, NSC, CIA-DDP, and DOD. The majority of interviews took place in the summers of 1970, 1978, and the spring of 1981.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with the author, Washington, DC, June 1970.

The policy episodes reconstructed below constitute a limited attempt to provide some partial glimpses into the identity, the rationales, and the politics of the Indonesian policy group which shaped US policy in the feverish period of deteriorating American-Indonesian relations during the nine months of 1965 leading up to the abortive coup. Together with other studies based heavily on declassified US documents and interviews with former officials, such as those by Edward Lee, Gabriel Kolko, Peter D. Scott, and H. W. Brands, I hope that this article will stimulate a full history of American-Indonesian relations in 1965—i.e., one based not only on a fully disclosed US archive but also on full access to Indonesian sources.<sup>20</sup>

### The Policy Shift: January–April, 1965

#### *The Ominous Indonesia Scene in American Eyes in January 1965*

Within the first weeks of 1965 President Sukarno had jolted the United States with a series of dramatic moves to the left both domestically and internationally.<sup>21</sup> On the last day of December 1964 he had dramatically quit the United Nations, charging its domination by the reactionary “Old Established Forces” (i.e., the United States and its allies, and also the Soviet Union, who were regarded as seeking to freeze the status quo of rank inequality in the international political economy). Cementing his already maturing ties with China, Sukarno dispatched his foreign minister to Peking in January, and proclaimed his intent to unite with China and other radical forces in a rival to the United Nations—a Conference of the New Emerging Forces (CONEFO).<sup>22</sup>

At the same time in Indonesia itself Sukarno had banned in mid-December the BPS (Body to Defend Sukarno), the last major attempt at organization by what the Embassy called “the civilian moderates.” (The name was calculated to make it awkward for the PKI to attack it.) Even more disturbing to Washington was the PKI’s public proposal to the President that “organized workers and peasants” receive military arms and training—and thus constitute a “fifth force” beyond the four existing armed forces in Indonesia. Although Sukarno did not publicly endorse this concept until May, it raised the spectre of the President using his charisma to undercut the military’s greatest political asset—its virtual monopoly of armed force. In the face of such Sukarno and PKI moves, the army’s leadership struggled to retain its cohesion. The Chief of Staff, General Yani, and a like-minded General Staff (SUAD) had in the meantime just joined with Defense Minister Nasution and other officers in the military elite to constitute a Council of Generals to develop contingency plans

<sup>20</sup>See Edward Lee as cited above; Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 173-85; Peter Dale Scott, “The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno,” *Pacific Affairs* 58, 2 (Summer 1985): 240-64; and H. W. Brands as cited above. Also see the recent articles by the enterprising journalist, Kathy Kadane, who has also used archival sources along with interviews. See *Washington Post*, May 21, 1990. Compare *inter alia* *New York Times*, July 12, 1990 and Carmel Budiardjo’s letter to the editor, *Washington Post*, June 13, 1990.

<sup>21</sup>For a revealing picture of the gloomy consensus view within the political section of Jones’ Embassy in early 1965, see “Indonesia: Political Developments in 1964 and Problem Areas for 1965,” 29 pp. Report by Embassy Political Counsellor, E. E. Masters, dated January 29, 1965. (Howard P. Jones Collection, Box 92, Ambassadorial Office File, 1958-1971) Archives of Hoover Institution (henceforth cited as “Embassy Political Report on 1964”). Also see Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, pp. 359-60. Other agencies tended to share the Embassy’s grim assessment of Indonesian trends but differed concerning the implications for US policy. See below for documents pertinent to the policy debate.

<sup>22</sup>David Mozingo, *Sino-Indonesian Relations: An Overview 1955-1965* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1965).

for dealing with the mounting PKI threat.<sup>23</sup> At stake was their position not only as a professional military elite, but as a recently ensconced elite in the political economy of Guided Democracy.

Heightening the tension and uncertainty about these trends were renewed rumors of Sukarno's deteriorating health—rumors which inevitably functioned as the catalyst for intensified political maneuver and tension in the long-building crisis over succession.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Reactions to Potential Coup Options in January*

Predictably the foreboding political context of January 1965 spawned a variety of US policy options designed to stimulate the anti-Communist army to take quick and firm action against the PKI—an action necessarily involving some form of coup d'état whether with or without Sukarno's acquiescence.<sup>25</sup>

The first coup option to receive formal attention in 1965 from the Indonesia policy group came from James Bell, the American Ambassador to Malaysia who had considerable previous Indonesian experience. Reflecting the external Malaysian/British perspective on Indonesian politics, Bell's proposal took the form of giving the Indonesian army leadership "assurances that GOM [Government of Malaysia] and Commonwealth would refrain from interference [in an Army-PKI conflict] at least unless it becomes apparent the PKI is going to come out on top?"<sup>26</sup>

The crux of Bell's coup stimulus cable is as follows:

If showdown over Communist influence in Indo is really imminent as appears may be case and if we prepared to abandon hope influencing Sukarno, and further, if we still believe army best bet to keep Indo out of Communist hands, we might consider following: that element Indo army which opposed PKI may be reluctant act quickly and firmly against internal threat because of fear, whether justified or not, that GOM [Government of Malaysia] and Commonwealth allies would strike at crucial moment. Such fear, though unjustified, nevertheless could worry ill-informed anti-Communist Indo leaders.

<sup>23</sup>The crucial issue is whether senior army officers organized their "Council of Generals" to plan a coup rather than simply as a countermeasure "to resist Sukarno and the PKI's bold new moves to crush it." For the latter interpretation and the related claim that the secret army "brain trust" had only General Yani and four close associates (General Suprpto, Haryono, Parman, and Sukendro), see CIA's reconstruction of the 1965 "coup". CIA, Directorate of Intelligence. *Intelligence Report: Indonesia 1965: The Coup that Backfired*, dated December 1968, pp. 188-92 (p.191 is blank with a puzzling "No Page" as the sole explanation). It is noteworthy that this is the first CIA study of Indonesian politics released to the public on the Agency's own initiative, but it studiously avoids discussing US policy conduct and thinking. For a lucid and balanced discussion of the major alternative theories about the origins of the coup, see Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup>*Inter alia* see CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, "Intelligence Memorandum: The Succession Problem in Indonesia," December 30, 1964, p. 1 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol 3, #148, LBJ Library).

<sup>25</sup>For US efforts to stimulate coups against Marxist-oriented governments in Brazil and Chile, see Phyllis Parker, *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), and US Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to International Activities, *Covert Action in Chile, 1963-1973*, Staff Report. Published as Appendix to *Covert Action Hearings*, Vol. 7 (Washington, DC: GPO, December 1975).

<sup>26</sup>Cable from Ambassador Bell to State Department, January 9, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3 #149b, LBJ Library). During his four-year tenure as Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs in the State Department from 1960 to July 1964, Bell had been a strong supporter of Jones.

Is there any way we could reach completely reliable Indo military with assurances that GOM and Commonwealth would refrain from interference at least unless it becomes apparent PKI going to come out on top?

Our policy has depended on army for some time. If we can give them this kind of shot in arm they might have more inclination act. If such approach seems worth consideration, we would of course first have to sell it to UK and Aussies as last-ditch effort.

The reaction of Ambassador Jones to Bell's proposal is highly instructive about the thinking of the chief accommodationist. Jones urged not outright rejection, but deferral of the proposal. His rationale coincided with the widely shared Indonesia policy group understanding of the prime causes of Indonesian army reluctance to act promptly to crush the PKI. As Jones' counter cable to Washington explained:<sup>27</sup>

Proposal reftel deserves consideration at some point but believe would be inappropriate at present to make such approach to Indonesian army. We are not at all certain that show-down over Communist influence is imminent since no group, including army, appears ready to stand up for non-Communist elements. Moreover we do not believe army is holding back out of concern that GOM and Commonwealth might strike if army became involved in internal fracas with PKI. Army reluctance at this time seems rather to stem from lack of unity within army itself and historic reluctance oppose policies and actions which favored or at least accepted by Sukarno.

Ambassador Jones' rebuttal went on to make two additional points more characteristic of his accommodationist stance. Just as he repeatedly warned of Sukarno's sensitivity to external pressures, so he admonished Washington that the Indonesian army leaders also had their national and personal respect.

Unless we certain army would be receptive to our initiative . . . I would fear any such approach at this time would rebound as unwarranted attempt interfere internally.

Jones' major concluding point, however, is the most illuminating in gauging his over-all posture on coup options generally:

I am also of opinion that there are other things we can and should try first. This EMB in near future will be recommending these as appropriate.

As discussed below, the Ambassador did, indeed, have alternative priority proposals of his own. And those sought to use Sukarno rather than the army to contain the worsening political situation. Since his arrival in Indonesia in 1958, Jones had assiduously cultivated both Sukarno and the army. Although he had no strong moral inhibition about supporting a military coup, his political preference had consistently been to persuade the charismatic nationalist Sukarno to legitimize Indonesia's closer association with the West.

Among the documented Washington evaluations of the Bell-Jones argument the most notable is the initial comment of McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's National Security Advisor. Prior to the arrival of Jones' objections on January 13, Bundy, in one of his rare interventions into Indonesia policy, scrawled on top of Bell's cable the following cryptic note to Chester Cooper, his senior assistant on the Far East.

<sup>27</sup>Cable from Ambassador Jones to State Department, January 13, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia Vol. 3 #149a, LBJ Library). For an extensive, spirited, and largely faithful representation of Ambassador Jones' views in 1964-1965, see his memoirs *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, especially pp. 340-84.

"Cooper:

It makes sense to me.  
Can we do it?

MG.B."<sup>28</sup>

The results of Cooper's efforts to investigate the feasibility of the proposal are among the most tantalizing data available to the researcher in Lyndon Johnson's National Security File. In his brief report back to McGeorge Bundy, Cooper hints at the ambivalence within the Indonesian policy group which he consulted, but in registering his own agreement with Jones he implies majority sentiment for Jones in the group, as well. Attaching his note to the two contending cables, Cooper wrote:

Mac -

You asked my views on the incoming from Malaya (attached) [*sic*]. I have brooded and have checked around and agree with Jones.

Chet <sup>29</sup>

Given Cooper's long employment as a CIA intelligence analyst, as well as his regular briefings from the CIA's office for covert action in the Far East (DDP-FE), it seems certain that Cooper's "checking around" embraced both the intelligence analysis (DDI) and clandestine services (DDP) of the CIA.

The significance of Washington's approval of Jones' case against Bell's scheme must not, however, be misread. The issue was more tactical than strategic for virtually all the decision makers. Not even Jones balked at the morality of a coup strategy and perhaps only Jones questioned the political necessity of promoting it immediately. The crucial questions were ones of tactics, not morality.

The number and complexity of tactical refinements on the coup method are suggested by another Jones cable on January 21, 1965, where he reported his conversation with an unidentified informant (most likely a high-level Indonesian officer from SUAD, very possibly Army Commander Yani himself) about the current state of SUAD coup plans.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, this inside view of army thinking offers powerful confirmation of the Ambassador's earlier stress on the army's reluctance to initiate a coup against Sukarno either because of their loyalty to the President or their appreciation of his undiminished mass political support. Accordingly, as generally assumed by most American officials, "the specific plans for takeover of the government" described to Jones were timed for the "moment Sukarno steps off the stage." What Jones had not recognized earlier, however, was the possibility of a coup mounted *before* Sukarno's demise, but which would be "handled in such a way as to preserve Sukarno's leadership." The simple notion that reluctance to move against Sukarno precluded a coup before his death was under challenge "by strong sentiment [among an] important segment of top military command." Moreover, if pressures from the left—including the arming of PKI paramilitary forces—did not subside, Jones' informant predicted that the army coup could come by March. Finally, however, it is helpful to quote Jones' conclud-

<sup>28</sup>See cable from Ambassador Bell to State Department, January 9, 1965.

<sup>29</sup>Note to Mac [McGeorge Bundy] from Chet [Chester Cooper], undated. (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3 #149, LBJ Library). Since the above-cited Bell cable of January 9 and Jones cable of January 13 are attached to Cooper's note, the date is presumably soon after the 13th. The fact that the next two items in the chronologically arranged NSF are dated 1/13 and 1/16 respectively makes it highly probable that Cooper's note is no later than the 16th.

<sup>30</sup>Cable from Ambassador Jones to State Department, January 21, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3 #91, LBJ Library).



ing comment on this report as a further reminder of the confusing welter of rumor and fear that sorely challenged the task of both political participants and analysts.

Comment: Dept will recognize this report as kind which has in past frequently appeared only to prove mirage. Nevertheless, source is excellent, and there are growing signs concern and discontent among army leaders and reports and rumors of this kind are on increase. Embassy will comment further ASAP.

Jones<sup>31</sup>

While Jones registered the consistent American skepticism about the probability of an early army coup, the CIA's analysts in Washington warned that an early succession to power would by no means ensure the army's capacity to hold power:

The beginnings of scramble for succession to Sukarno are already evident. Should Sukarno leave the scene in the near future, we believe that the initial struggle to replace him would be won by Army and non-Communist elements, though Communists would continue to play an important role. Such a government would probably continue to be anti-U.S., xenophobic, and a threat to peace. Furthermore, unless the non-Communist leaders displayed more backbone, effectiveness, and unity than they have to date, the chances of eventual PKI dominance would quickly mount.<sup>32</sup>

Given these doubts about the current army leadership's chances in the politics of succession, it seems highly probable that at least some of the coup scenarios explored by the Indonesia policy group focused not only on the questions of timing and target, but also on authorship. Was there a senior officer outside the dominant, but apparently cautious, Nasution and Yani factions who commanded sufficient support within the army to warrant exploring his interest and ability to mount an early and effective coup?<sup>33</sup>

#### *Retaliation Measures Rejected*

As various agencies pressed the search for a better coup strategy, the Indonesia policy group inevitably also debated the perennial question of whether and how to influence Sukarno. In mid-February Sukarno and the PKI intensified their offensive against American government installations and corporate properties, with the dual effect of discrediting Ambassador Jones' persistent calls for a policy of placation and legitimizing the demands for a policy of retaliation.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to reiterate that in his recommendations Ambassador Jones still enjoyed the support of not only the White House staff, but much of FE. The effectiveness of this broad coalition against what Thomson would call "the diplomacy of pique" was best illustrated in their successful restraint of USIA Director Carl Rowan's angry reaction to Sukarno's seizure of the USIA Library in Jakarta in mid-February 1965.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>CIA, Office of National Estimates, CIA, "Special Memorandum No. 4-65: Principal Problems and Prospects in Indonesia," January 26, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3, #152, LBJ Library.)

<sup>33</sup>The Dutch scholar, W. F. Wertheim, and others have argued that General Suharto may have, alone or in league with the CIA, engineered the October 1 coup. For a careful discussion of this theory, see Crouch, *Army and Politics*, esp. pp. 123-25.

<sup>34</sup>Interviews with key officials in both the White House and FE confirm the evidence in declassified documents for this general pattern of response.

<sup>35</sup>The Indonesia policy group politics of formulating a response to Sukarno's seizure of the USIA Library provides a dramatic and illuminating picture of how delicate a balance existed between a diplomacy of pique and a

On the very day that the United States formally responded to Indonesia's seizure of USIA libraries by closing down those operations, Ambassador Jones cabled Washington that the "government instigated and inspired" anti-American campaign "is gaining momentum and more drastic methods may be necessary at some point to attempt stop it or at least meet it in way which will help preserve US position and prestige in other areas."<sup>36</sup> The ambassador then presented a five-page list of twenty "possible retaliatory measures together with what seems to us probable effects these moves here and elsewhere." Moving first through ten relatively mild diplomatic steps, the escalatory ladder then stipulated the classic trinity of economic sanctions, military intimidation, and diplomatic rupture.

Unquestionably the ambassador felt acute ambivalence in reaching the tentative conclusion that his seven-year effort to woo Sukarno had culminated in virtual cold war. Always attentive to his ambassadorial priority of protecting the lives and property of Americans, he had no choice but to draft what he hoped was only a contingency plan for retaliation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the tireless, ever resilient ambassador also sought to continue his battle to salvage his accommodationist policy. Shrewdly he had seized the initiative from his critics by himself first addressing the need for a retaliatory contingency plan. This allowed him to select and define the entire country team's endorsement of the negative evaluation. In this way, as always, he was laying the groundwork for again advancing his own preferred response to the crisis. In any case, the following country team summary assessment of the retaliatory options surely put proponents of such measures on the defensive:

On balance, we believe USG would lose more than it would gain by responding to GOI harassments in kind. While it might be self-satisfying for the moment to close Indo information programs in US, this would clearly preclude us from carrying on any info or cultural programs at our embassy here. Similarly, economic retaliatory measures . . . would not seriously affect Indo economy but would only drive Indos closer to Communist bloc and accelerate takeover remaining U.S.-owned enterprises (oil companies) here. Real punitive measures also highly inadvisable while we have so many hostages in Indo.<sup>38</sup>

#### *The Ambassador's Showdown with FE*

As measured by Washington's subsequent rejection of all but the mildest retaliatory measures, the ambassador and his allies on this issue in FE, as well as the White House, had won a substantial victory. The ambassador remained, however, beleaguered on what for him were the three primary issues. It is these which he passionately addressed in the conclusion of a long speech to fellow ambassadors and Washington officials at a policy conference in Baguio on March 10.<sup>39</sup> And it is on all three of these that he suffered substantial but

---

diplomacy of restraint. See Memorandum for Secretary of State from Carl T. Rowan, February 18, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3, #158a, LBJ Library). For the urgent concern of the White House staff when they learned that Rowan might be taking his case to the President, see Memorandum for Mr. Bundy from James Thomson, February 19, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 3, #158, LBJ Library.)

<sup>36</sup>Cable from Jones to State Department, March 3, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #41, LBJ Library).

<sup>37</sup>This interpretation of Jones' bureaucratic tactics is based only on the writer's conjectures.

<sup>38</sup>Cable from Jones to State Department, March 3, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #43 LBJ Library).

<sup>39</sup>Most of the accessible documentation on Baguio resides in the James Thomson Papers Box 18, Far East, 1961-1966: Baguio Conferences—Baguio II, 3165, JFK Library. The most complete version of Ambassador Jones' important speech at Baguio is, however, only available in the Jones papers. See "American Indonesian Relations," Presentation by Ambassador Howard Jones at the 1965 Chiefs of Mission Conference Baguio The Philippines, undated [c. March 10], 27 pp. (Howard P. Jones Collection Box 21, Speeches and Writings, 1950-1971, Archives of Hoover Institution) [henceforth cited as Jones, "Baguio Speech"].

by no means complete defeat at the hands of the FE. The extent of the ambassador's setback is provided in the short term by a mid-March memorandum from Under Secretary of State George Ball to President Johnson, which concisely reports to the President the state of US Indonesia policy in the wake of the Baguio conference.<sup>40</sup>

The first of Jones' policy recommendations is to "continue to seek means to reduce tensions in the Indo-Malaysia dispute through diplomatic means."<sup>41</sup> Mindful that Washington had neither the interest nor the capability to play a *de facto* mediator's role, as it had ultimately done in 1962 in the West Irian dispute, Jones limits his specific proposal to "support [moves toward negotiations] and actively maintain our coordination with Thailand, Japan and others on this subject even if it is not feasible to take the initiative ourselves." In January the White House had backed a more energetic US initiative, but backed away in the face of British opposition and the more recent outbursts by Sukarno.<sup>42</sup> (In sharp contrast to Jones' familiar high stress on the Malaysia diplomacy front, Ball's mid-March memo does not even mention the question of Malaysia.)

The second Jones' recommendation dealt with what had become the most hotly debated immediate question on the American agenda: Whether, how much, and at what pace the US should reduce the official American mission in Indonesia? Here the ambassador's long association with the American aid program dating back to his tenure as a mission director in the middle 1950s reinforced his conviction that most US programs in Indonesia were good not only for buffering American interests, but also for Indonesian society. The issue in spring 1965, however, in Jones' inflated language, was not only a political one—but implicitly also one of national and personal honor.

At the moment, however, we face in Indonesia a basic question—do we pull in our horns and reduce our operations to a bare minimum or do we continue to hold on, come Hell or high water, doing what we can, never giving in an inch except where we have no choice.

As most of you here know, I have felt that every inch of withdrawal handed that much of a victory to the Communists. Aidit, the head of the PKI, has been quoted as having as his objective the driving out of Americans from Indonesia. A recent report indicated he hoped to move relations with the US to the point of diplomatic rupture in three months. Well, I don't think we ought to help him achieve his objective. I think we ought to stand fast with the maximum American presence it is possible to preserve.<sup>43</sup>

George Ball's memorandum leaves no doubt that the State Department has rejected the ambassador's recommendation and its supporting rationale. In a blunt statement of the core argument of the low posture faction Ball says:

Since we are presently Sukarno's principal target it would seem sound policy to reduce our visibility in Indonesia and give him less to shoot at.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>"Memorandum for the President: The Deteriorating Situation in Indonesia," from Under Secretary of State George Ball, undated [c. mid-March, 1965], 9 pp. (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #187, LBJ Library) [henceforth cited as Ball, "Mid-March Memo"]. Also see cable from Department to Jones, March 5, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #3 LBJ Library).

<sup>41</sup>Jones, "Baguio Speech," p. 22

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup>Ball, "Mid-March Memo," p.8.

Earlier in the memorandum Ball had explained that because State saw "little chance of this situation changing within the foreseeable future, . . . we have, therefore, adopted a policy of reducing the US official presence to the absolute minimum."<sup>45</sup> Ball then enumerated the specific actions already in train concerning (1) the virtual closing of USIA (2) the placing of AID on caretaker status, (3) the elimination of the Military Training Group (Miltag), (4) the probable withdrawal of the Peace Corps, and (5) the phased reduction of embassy dependents. Ball's discussion of the low posture concluded with another, and ultimately the most significant, justification for the new policy. Fending off the ambassador's veiled version of the classic opposition charge in the cold war era that his adversaries were abandoning Indonesia to the Communists, Ball sought to reassure a President already mortified with fear of such a charge on Vietnam policy:

The reduction or even removal of our presence would not mean turning the country over to the Communists. On the contrary, it is more likely to mean a sharpened confrontation between the Communist Party and anti-Communists in the country.<sup>46</sup>

Ball's brief memo did not need to spell out the expectation and hope in the Indonesia policy group that the "sharpened confrontation" would precipitate some type of physical clash between the army and the still virtually weaponless PKI. This had been an implicit assumption shared by Ambassadors Bell and Jones in their debate over the tactics for strengthening army resolve—and to the extent that it almost inevitably meant the killing of many Indonesians, the low posture policy was a policy of violence. The United States did not have a prime responsibility for creating the antagonisms that underlay the anticipated clash, but surely its long nurturing of the army must be seen also as a policy of acquiescence and even promotion of political violence. In that sense there was a fundamental continuity in the change from accommodation to low posture.

Ambassador Jones had reserved to last the most strenuous plea for his most treasured policy—"a policy of actively attempting to influence Sukarno."<sup>47</sup> Too often dismissed as a futile attempt at appeasement, Jones' approach to Sukarno had always been grounded in several political assumptions. Central was the virtually unchallenged political power of Sukarno which left his would-be successors, like the army and the PKI, with no choice but to work with him. Moreover, given the contradictory intelligence about his health, Jones argued, "we cannot safely assume that we can sit back and comfortably await his successor." Accordingly, the U.S. also had to "face up to the necessity of working with Sukarno" because "no effective change in Indonesian developments is likely to take place during Sukarno's lifetime except through Sukarno himself."<sup>48</sup> Once accepted, these assumptions required, Jones insisted, attending to Sukarno's personality. Above all beware of his vanity. This required both flattery and a studious avoidance of pressure. "What proponents of a 'get tough' policy with Sukarno ignore is that his reaction to such pressure is completely the opposite from that desired by us. . . ."<sup>49</sup> The ambassador attached such great importance to this latter point that he tended to explain Sukarno's anti-American campaign as triggered mainly by the "provocation" of President Johnson's agreement in July 1964 to send token

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>Jones, "Baguio Speech," p. 26.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

military aid to Malaysia.<sup>50</sup> It followed logically that only changes in U.S. policy could restore Sukarno to an amicable posture.

While not questioning the ambassador's assumptions about Sukarno's central role in Indonesian politics, Under Secretary Ball indicted Jones' tactics as so counter-productive that the policy should be abandoned. Ball told the President:

For a number of years we have pursued the policy of trying to work with Sukarno, using the devices of flattery and economic help. I think we have about played this line out. Any further efforts to appeal to Sukarno's megalomania would most likely only reinforce his view that the US needs him more than he needs us. On occasions when we have attempted to placate Sukarno after a particularly outrageous act on his part, the effect has been to confuse and discourage the potential opposition to his policies.<sup>51</sup>

### The Bunker Mission

Under Secretary Ball's mid-March memorandum to the President essentially marked the end of the Jones policy in its most characteristic form and the triumph of the "low posture" advocates. The process of shifting policy required, however, a mechanism for smoothing the transition in both Jakarta and Washington. This was achieved by dispatching the President's trusted senior diplomat, Ellsworth Bunker, to Indonesia in April in response to the "crisis" of March 1965 over President Sukarno's harassment of US installations and the "administrative takeovers" of US economic enterprises. Bunker acted as a presidential envoy to Indonesia to assess the seriousness of the "crisis" and the prospects for future US-Indonesian relations.<sup>52</sup> Through his visit Bunker managed to reassure Indonesia's moderate civilian and military leaders of the United States' long-term interest in Indonesia. And, more important, he at least temporarily defused the volatile Sukarno's hostility to the American policy shift which would be symbolized by the change in ambassadors.<sup>53</sup> Back in Washington, Bunker's role was equally critical to the launching of the new policy. To the delight of the FE experts, not only did his formal report spell out the rationale for the low posture strategy, but his personal prestige facilitated securing the presidential imprimatur on the policy.<sup>54</sup> Bunker further expedited the implementation of the new policy by winning presi-

<sup>50</sup>Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, pp. 342-43.

<sup>51</sup>Ball, "Mid-March Memo," p. 8.

<sup>52</sup>Under Secretary Ball recommended Bunker for the assignment not only because of his reputation as a senior diplomat, but also because of "his own prestige with the Indonesians" due to his crucial "good offices" role in negotiating the transfer of West New Guinea (West Irian) from the Dutch to Indonesia in 1962. "Memorandum for the President: Proposed Mission for Ellsworth Bunker to Indonesia," March 18, 1965, from Under Secretary of State Ball, (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #168, LBJ Library).

<sup>53</sup>This was the judgment of FE experts who accompanied Bunker. Interviews with David Cuthell, Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs in 1965, and Robert Lindquist, Indonesia desk officer in 1962-1963. Compare less positive journalist appraisals in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in late April 1965.

<sup>54</sup>In interviews, leaders of the FE low posture faction stressed the importance to their cause of having Bunker as their *de facto* advocate to the President. Bunker clearly commanded the President's high esteem. Johnson had chosen Bunker to defuse the crisis in Panama in 1964 and would choose him again in June 1965 to manage the Dominican Republic crisis. Later, the President appointed Bunker as ambassador to South Vietnam. It is also noteworthy that McGeorge Bundy, in his briefing memo to the President for his meeting with Bunker, proposed that Bunker be appointed Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. With this extraordinary standing with the NS advisor and the President, Bunker's mission could and did function, in the view of the low posture faction, as an "end run" around the inter-agency consultations that often compromise policy proposals to death. See "Memorandum for the President: Ambassador Bunker's Report on Indonesia," April 24, 1965, from McGeorge Bundy (James Thomson Papers, Box 11, National Security Staff, 1964-1966: McGeorge Bundy, Gen-

dential acceptance of his urgent recommendation that Ambassador Jones' long projected retirement be accelerated. Significantly, Deputy Assistant Secretary (FE) Marshall Green, one of the influential leaders of the low posture faction, was selected as Jones' replacement.

Bunker's report provides the single most comprehensive formulation of the political assessment and policy rationale on which the low posture strategy was predicated. Once legitimated by the President, Bunker's views would be frequently invoked by policy makers throughout the spring and summer of 1965—to the point where one can speak of the institutionalization of the low posture strategy. For all these reasons, the Bunker report deserves the thorough explication provided below.

*Assessment of Sukarno's American Policy:*

Ambassador Bunker's meetings with President Sukarno in mid April in Indonesia convinced him that there were no prospects for improved US relations with Indonesia in the short term. In his report to President Johnson, Bunker explicitly corroborated Under Secretary Ball's rejection of Ambassador Jones' contention that US support for Malaysia was the prime factor in Sukarno's hostility toward the United States. For Bunker, that was only one of the "ostensible reasons advanced by Sukarno," along with "our 'intervention' in South Vietnam." In Bunker's analysis "other and more fundamental reasons" accounted for Sukarno's hostility to the United States.<sup>55</sup> Reflecting his respect for the judgement of the "FE experts" who accompanied him on the mission, Bunker cited Sukarno's personal ambition for Afro-Asian leadership; his anti-imperialist ideology which identified the United States "as enemy #1"; his "proclaimed Marxist" antipathy for capitalism; his obsession with building national unity even at the price of economic development; and his "mystical belief in his own destiny." Significantly, in treating Sukarno's relationship with the PKI, Bunker noted the "influence of the PKI" on Sukarno, but also recognized "Sukarno's confidence that he can bend the PKI to his will. . . ." Whatever the relative weight of these "fundamental factors" in Sukarno's policy making, Bunker appraised them as keeping Sukarno at odds with Washington. Pointedly he dismissed Ambassador Jones' view that a US-supported settlement of the Malaysian problem would reverse the decline in US relations with Sukarno:

While the settlement of the Malaysia problem directly, and that of Southeast Asia indirectly, might remove some tension in Indo-U.S. relations, it is probable that these will be under strain for a considerable period because of the factors enumerated above.

*Assessment of Indonesian Domestic Politics*

Bunker balanced this somber assessment of Sukarno's commitment to a radical foreign policy with a more mixed assessment of the domestic political scene. Again Sukarno was the central figure. His power remained unassailable and preeminent in both domestic politics and foreign policy.

Sukarno is still the symbol for Indonesian unity and independence, believes in himself and his destiny, and is able and shrewd. There is little question of his continued hold on the loyalty of the Indonesian people, who in large measure look to him for leadership,

---

eral-Chronological File, 4/65–5/65, JFK Library) [henceforth "The Bunker Report"]. Note: The NSC has "sanitized" one-third of this important policy summary *cum* recommendation. Perhaps significantly this Bundy memo is not in the NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, LBJ Library.

<sup>55</sup>The Bunker Report, Part I, pp. 1–2.

trust his leadership, and are willing to follow him. No force in the country can attack him nor is there evidence that any significant group would want to do so.<sup>56</sup>

What disturbed Bunker was Sukarno's use of his power to favor the PKI. "Sukarno has, however, increasingly shown a tendency to take positions consistently favoring the pro-communist forces. Unless he moves to restore the balance, the drift toward communist domination of the country will continue."<sup>57</sup>

Sukarno's leaning to the PKI created what Bunker termed "a serious dilemma" for the Indonesian army:

how to inhibit the further expansion of PKI power while remaining loyal to Sukarno when Sukarno himself was encouraging PKI expansion. So far, the army response has been to remain publicly aloof from the conflict between the PKI and its civilian rivals, to concentrate on strengthening its own imperfect internal unity, to give ground grudgingly when pressed, and to plan against the day when Sukarno's death releases it from its dilemma.<sup>58</sup>

In estimating the threat to the army posed by the PKI, Bunker exposed, however, not only the Communist party's strengths, but also its weaknesses. The former included: "powerful organization," "brilliant manipulation of other political forces," dominance in the labor field, "virtual control of the national press and radio," and an expanding, if very minor position within the Cabinet (4 out of 80 seats). At the same time, the report elaborated some major vulnerabilities:

The bulk of its strength is in Java, a handicap in a country where animosity against Javanese is strong in the outer islands; it has no paramilitary arm to challenge the army, although it is now making strong efforts to build one; and its freedom of action remains limited by the need to continue a subservient posture toward Sukarno. A further point of both strength and weakness is the party's open alignment with the Chinese Communists in the Sino-Soviet split, a strength in that this position corresponds with that of Sukarno and a weakness in that it runs counter both to the widespread Indonesian dislike of ethnic Chinese and to the dependence of the armed forces on Soviet arms.<sup>59</sup>

Reinforcing the hopeful aspects of the Indonesian scene for Americans were the modest stirrings among "non-communist civilian forces, especially the Moslems." Overall the picture seemed mixed in Bunker's eyes.

The non-communist civilian forces are fragmented, disorganized and crippled by the protective urge on the part of many of its leaders to join the Sukarno-PKI bandwagon. While their showing against the PKI has been unimpressive, they do hold to crucial long-range advantages: (a) collectively they still represent a substantial majority of all politically conscious Indonesians, and (b) while many of them distrust the army, cooperation with the army will probably be open to them in any final showdown with the PKI.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4, par. 15.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 16.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, Part IV, p. 5, par. 2.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, part IV, p. 6, par. 2.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3.

Finally, the Bunker estimate of the political situation addressed the future—i.e., the post-Sukarno era. Prudently eschewing any pretense of “accurate forecast,” Bunker’s report, nonetheless, ventured this qualified, but reassuring prediction of the army’s probably “commanding influence” in the immediate wake of Sukarno.

At this moment no political force in Indonesia seems in a position clearly to dominate the scene on Sukarno’s death. The PKI obviously is growing in strength and, given a few more years of Sukarno’s protection, conceivably could be in a position to do so. Yet the party’s weakness and vulnerabilities are such that even seizure of power in Djakarta need not spell a communist Indonesia.

The army would seem in the best position to exert a commanding influence if the Sukarno regime were to end tomorrow. How long it can maintain its position is problematical, as is the direction this influence would take if exercised. The threat of civil disorders, a real fear of jeopardizing national unity, and divided counsel and personal ambitions within the army leadership could operate against an effective army role.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Recommendations for US Policy*

Ambassador Bunker argued that US interests in Indonesia demanded that the United States “seek to retain a continued presence in Indonesia.”<sup>62</sup> He stressed that “our major effort should be directed toward influencing long-range development in Indonesia,”<sup>63</sup> offering essentially three recommendations concerning how “to play for the long-term stakes.” Concurrently, the United States should “avoid punitive actions,” “reduce our visibility,” and sustain our links with the army and civilian moderates.

Although Bunker had rejected Ambassador Jones’ “accommodationist” approach to Sukarno or the Malaysia problem, he shared Jones’ sensitivity to Sukarno’s nationalist pride and personal vanity. “Avoiding punitive action” was thus critical to maintaining the US presence because even the appearance of punitive action would provoke Sukarno to fulfill the PKI goal of breaking diplomatic relations with the United States.<sup>64</sup> The corollary guidelines advanced by Bunker also rejected the “deep freeze” option of distancing the United States from Sukarno.

“Reducing our visibility” would deprive the PKI of easily exploitable targets and also benefit the Indonesian army:

U.S. visibility should be reduced so that those opposed to the communists and extremists may be free to handle a confrontation, which they believe will come, without the incubus of being attacked as defenders of the neo-colonialists and imperialists.<sup>65</sup>

“Maintaining contact with the constructive elements of strength in Indonesia,” the third of Bunker’s primary recommendations, should be executed “within the limitations of a drastically reduced assistance program.”<sup>66</sup> Most AID projects, USIA, and the Peace Corps would all close. Bunker also recommended terminating the modest Military Assistance Program, with the exception of urging fulfilment of a US commitment to Army Commander

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 8–9.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., Part I, p.1, par. 1 and Part IV.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., Part II, p. 1, par. 6.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., Part I, p. 3, par. 10

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., par.11.



Yani to complete an expensive "fixed communication project."<sup>67</sup> However, "... in order to keep maximum contact with the Indonesian military we should retain a few selected officers of the military assistance training group, either as a part of the attache staff or as a separate unit within the Embassy."<sup>68</sup>

In sum, while Ambassador Bunker concluded that Indonesia essentially would have to save itself, he was by no means giving up on the army. He seemed quite hopeful that the army would—but most likely in the long term—prevail in its struggle with the PKI after the passing of Sukarno from the political stage. Nor was Bunker giving up on the American role. He believed that a reduced, non-provocative US presence was the best means available to the US "... to create conditions which will give elements of potential strength the most favorable condition for confrontation."<sup>69</sup>

The declassified portion of the Bunker report does not discuss what covert action the United States might undertake to further accelerate and sharpen that anticipated and desired confrontation between the army and the PKI, but it pointedly opposed any repeat of the US support in 1958 for regional rebellion against the Sukarno government:

Because the ideal of national unity is an overriding obsession with practically all Indonesians, stronger by far than any real divisive regional feeling, we should avoid becoming involved in efforts to split off Sumatra or other areas from Indonesia.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, although never directly addressing the question of whether the US should support a coup against Sukarno, the aforementioned assessment of both Sukarno's unassailable power and the army's persisting loyalty to their leader strongly suggest that the United States would be reluctant to promote a coup against Sukarno. It seems plausible that these same assumptions would also deter the US from associating with any plot to assassinate Sukarno. Although not mentioned in the report, both American government documents and interviews with US officials, including Ambassador Bunker, corroborate their public claim that the United States had assured Sukarno that it would not support any assassination plots against him.<sup>71</sup>

In assessing the influence of Ambassador Bunker's report on President Johnson, it is important to note the accurate and approving briefings given the President by National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and his chief Indonesia assistant, James Thomson. Although Thomson's dovish inclinations on Vietnam had by April 1965 undoubtedly eroded his credentials with his boss, McGeorge Bundy, on Vietnam policy, he appears to have continued to hold Bundy's trust on Indonesia.<sup>72</sup> Certainly Thomson's views seem to have been influential in Bundy's briefing of the President on the Bunker Mission. And that briefing almost certainly predisposed the President to accept Ambassador Bunker's sober, but reassuring conclusions about Indonesia. For, by the spring of 1965, Bundy had won the

---

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., Part II, p. 2, par. 2. The specific cuts are detailed in *ibid.*, Part II, pp. 2–3.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., Part II, p. 3, par. 3.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., Part I, p. 3, par. 12.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., Part II, p. 1, par. 8.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Ambassador Bunker in August 1978. Also see below US denial of Gilchrist letter.

<sup>72</sup>For Thomson's views on Vietnam at the time, see "Memorandum to MGB: FE Costs of our VN Policy," from James Thomson, June 11, 1965 (James Thomson Papers, National Security Staff, 1964–1966, JFK Library). Also see "Thomson Oral History," LBJ Library, pp. 50–56.

President's confidence as screener, summarizer, and interpreter of the flood of foreign policy documents addressed to the President.<sup>73</sup>

Also critical, of course, is the question of what Bunker chose to communicate orally to the President when he finally met with him on April 26. Bunker himself claimed that there were no secret oral messages about coup plots, only an underscoring of his written recommendations.<sup>74</sup> In particular, he invoked his private conversations with military leaders Nasution and Yani, as well as his meeting with one of the leading civilian moderates, Adam Malik, whom Bunker knew and respected personally from their long mutual involvement in the diplomatic negotiations over West New Guinea in 1962. Although Malik dissented from the army leaders' support for reducing the US presence, he joined them in assuring Bunker that the army would not permit the PKI's ascendancy to power. Finally, in what McGeorge Bundy's briefing memo to the President characterized as "Bunker's only urgent oral recommendation," Ambassador Bunker urged the acceleration of the appointment and dispatch of Ambassador Jones' replacement.<sup>75</sup> Apart from the compelling need to reassure Sukarno about the continuity in US policy, Bunker was worried that Jones would not be able to execute Bunker's prescription for a firmer, more sober style in American dealings with Sukarno. Like Under Secretary Ball, Bunker judged that Jones had, indeed, succumbed to "nativitis." He trusted Sukarno too much and he too quickly allowed himself to "play Sukarno's game" on issues like Malaysia.<sup>76</sup>

Only further research can clarify how Lyndon Johnson personally responded to the Bunker Report's rationale for a US low posture policy in Indonesia. The limited body of declassified documents and interview data do suggest strongly that the President at least acquiesced. This was primarily because, in the eyes of Chester Cooper, his senior NSC specialist on Asia, the President was "swallowed up by Vietnam." Moreover, it is the unanimous judgement of that same staffer and other White House officials of higher rank, that the President's inattention to Indonesia was also a function of his personal disinterest in and ignorance about Indonesia.<sup>77</sup> Finally, one of the few testimonies that offers informed insight into the President's thinking about Indonesia in the summer of 1965 is the retrospective oral history of NSC Asianist, James Thomson. Himself deeply committed to persuading the President to adopt and then sustain Bunker's low posture policy, Thomson speaks to the ostensible paradox of a President who escalated the American war in Vietnam at the very moment that he acquiesced in the drift toward communism of Southeast Asia's largest, richest, and most strategically located country. Responding to the interviewer's query about Johnson's views of Indonesia, Thomson recalled:

And it was Komer's<sup>78</sup> impression and mine that President Johnson was remarkably understanding of the Indonesian drift; was not going to panic about it; certainly was not

<sup>73</sup>The testimony of McGeorge Bundy's own staff confirms the dependence of the President on Bundy, reflected in the way Bundy addressed the President. Also see Halberstam, *Best and the Brightest*, p. 62.

<sup>74</sup>Interview with Ambassador Bunker in August 1978.

<sup>75</sup>See "Memorandum for the President: Ambassador Bunker's Meeting with You Today," April 26, 1965, from McGeorge Bundy (James Thomson Papers, Box 11, National Security Staff, 1964-1966; JFK Library).

<sup>76</sup>Interview with Ambassador Bunker, August 1978.

<sup>77</sup>Interviews with Chester Cooper in Washington in June 1970 and May 1981, corroborated by other former White House officials including Bill Moyers in conversation in March 1986.

<sup>78</sup>Robert Komer's influence on Indonesia policy had been much stronger in 1961-1964 than at this time. By 1965 Thomson and, to a lesser degree, Chester Cooper, covered Indonesia for McGeorge Bundy. Interviews with James Thomson in 1969, Robert Komer in 1970, Chester Cooper in 1970 and 1981.

going to intervene; and would, as he should, count on the long-term corrosive impact of Indonesian nationalism on Indonesian communism, if in fact that was the way Indonesia moved.

I had the feeling that he played the Indonesian pre-change-of-power months with great deftness, perhaps, I hope, learning some lessons from Vietnam. We didn't need to tangle in another one of those situations.<sup>79</sup>

### The Three-Month Lull from May to July

Even before Bunker left Indonesia, Sukarno had shifted to what had become a consuming preoccupation of his foreign policy in 1965. This was promotion of his grandiose plan for CONEFO (Conference of The New Emerging Forces)—the launching pad for the establishment of a Third World alternative to the United Nations.<sup>80</sup> Scheduled to be convened in Jakarta in mid-1966, CONEFO had become an emotional and ideological obsession for Sukarno. It explained his concern with the politics of the forthcoming 2nd Asian-African Conference set for Algiers in late June. That conference was important to Indonesia also because Sukarno had waged a diplomatic offensive to deny Malaysia—the target of his “confrontation” policy since the fall of 1963—admission to the conference. Success on the Malaysia issue would enhance Sukarno's prestige and thus his prospects for winning broader support for CONEFO among African and Asian countries. These efforts of Sukarno to radicalize Asian-African politics naturally disturbed Washington, but the US complained directly to Sukarno only when he escalated his castigation of US imperialism in Vietnam. Overall, however, the feverish momentum of the anti-American campaign of February–March subsided as President Sukarno pursued his dream of CONEFO.

Sukarno's foreign policy agenda was always, of course, intertwined with his domestic political priorities.<sup>81</sup> It appeared, however, in May–July 1965 that because of both his commitment to CONEFO and his probable ambivalence about the quickening pace of the PKI campaign for cabinet positions, Sukarno was eager to subordinate domestic politics to his foreign policy ambitions.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, Sukarno's deep suspicions of the army leadership flamed at the end of May when he questioned General Yani about renewed allegations that a recently formed Council of Generals had been preparing a coup against him.<sup>83</sup> Even more inflammatory was the issue of “the Gilchrist letter.”<sup>84</sup> Allegedly written by the British ambassador to Jakarta, Sir Andrew Gilchrist, to the Foreign Office in London, the letter described an American-British plan to enlist “local army friends” to assassinate Sukarno,

<sup>79</sup>“James Thomson's Oral History” on deposit at LBJ Library, pp. 49–50.

<sup>80</sup>Michael Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1983), ch. 4. Also Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, pp. 364–65.

<sup>81</sup>Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy*, ch. 3 and 4.

<sup>82</sup>The army commander, General Yani, continued to interpret Sukarno's support for the PKI's militancy as dictated by his own political power requirements rather than ideological commitment to a PKI victory. See Crouch, *Army in Politics*, p. 79. In a series of interviews with the author in the fall of 1981, the then only surviving member of Yani's “braintrust,” General Sukendro, emphatically confirmed that this was Yani's view throughout the pre-coup period.

<sup>83</sup>Crouch, *Army in Politics*, p. 106. Also see detailed discussion of Council of Generals issues in CIA, *The Coup that Backfired*, pp. 188–92; 197–206.

<sup>84</sup>On the Gilchrist letter, see CIA, *The Coup that Backfired*, pp. 192–97 and Jones, *Indonesia The Possible Dream*, p. 377 n. For a plausible and colorful account of the KGB and Czech intelligence in transmitting the forged Gilchrist letter to Foreign Minister Subandrio through the sexually active Indonesian ambassador in Prague, see Ladislav Bittman, *The Deception Game* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981).

Subandrio, and—rather inconsistently—army commander Yani.<sup>85</sup> Washington registered a formal protest when Subandrio released the Gilchrist letter to the public at a news conference in Cairo in early July.<sup>86</sup> Apart from this incident, the US receded as a prime focus for domestic political conflict in May–July. Presumably in deference to Sukarno's international priorities, the PKI largely suspended its campaigns against American business and government targets.

Predictably Washington welcomed the Sukarno-induced lull in Indonesian-American relations. Increasingly absorbed with Vietnam, as well as the new Dominican crisis, President Johnson and other top officials were content to allow the FE experts to proceed on their own to implement the recommendations of the Bunker Report following the President's formal endorsement in late April. The Sukarno lull thus functioned to facilitate the relatively tranquil process of lowering the American profile in Indonesia. Ambassador Jones took an emotional farewell of Indonesia in mid-May,<sup>87</sup> and the deputy chief of mission, Frank Galbraith, became the chargé d'affaires for the two-month interval before the arrival of the new ambassador, Marshall Green. As Galbraith himself characterized his role, he concentrated primarily on "dismantling the extensive American assistance programs," and reducing the size of the official American community.<sup>88</sup>

#### *The President Meets His New Ambassador*

Only once during the May–July lull in American-Indonesian relations did McGeorge Bundy direct the President's attention to Indonesian affairs.<sup>89</sup> At the behest of his Indonesia specialist, James Thomson, Bundy recommended that the President meet with both the outgoing and incoming ambassadors—Howard Jones and Marshall Green.<sup>90</sup> In briefing the President for the meeting on June 30, Bundy and Thomson sought not only to ensure a smooth ambassadorial succession in Indonesia, but to bolster the President's grasp of and confidence in the new US policy by providing both explication and evaluation.

Bundy and Thomson had clearly taken seriously Bunker's stress on maintaining the dialogue with Sukarno and were worried that the vain and volatile leader would interpret the long hiatus between ambassadors as a signal that Washington no longer valued that dialogue. They explained to President Johnson:

The main purpose of the meeting is to ease the way for Ambassador Green in Djakarta: by demonstrating your personal interest in Indo-US relations, and by dramatizing the continuity of US policy despite the change in ambassadors. (The Indos have doubts about this.)<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup>The State Department's formal denial of the charges of US involvement in an assassination plot against Sukarno made pointed reference to Ambassador Bunker's personal assurances to Sukarno in April that the US would not support such a plot. See Deptel 123, June 3, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #21, LBJ Library) and Embtel 2623, June 3, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #105, LBJ Library).

<sup>86</sup>Embtel 29, July 7, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #109, LBJ Library).

<sup>87</sup>Jones, *Indonesia The Possible Dream*, pp. 366–67.

<sup>88</sup>Interview with Ambassador Francis Galbraith, May 1981.

<sup>89</sup>This judgment rests on review of currently declassified NSC staff documents in the LBJ Library NSF: Country File and the separate, but somewhat overlapping NSF: Memos to the President containing the chronological files of McGeorge Bundy and the NSF files of McGeorge Bundy.

<sup>90</sup>"Memorandum for the President: Appointment for Ambassador Green," June 15, 1965, from James Thomson and McGeorge Bundy (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #184a, LBJ Library).

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*

On June 29, the day before Johnson's meeting with the ambassadors, in a memo signed by them both, they spelled out "the fundamentals" of current policy for the President to "reemphasize" to the ambassadors.

This session also provides a chance for you to re-emphasize our need to keep playing the vital long-term stakes in Indonesia. (100 million people, potentially the world's fifth richest nation.) Despite Sukarno's speeches and despite provocations, our policy remains the fundamentals of the Bunker report: to maintain courteous communication with Sukarno while he lives, to keep the door open to friendly relations with Indo people, and to do all we can to prevent a Communist takeover.<sup>92</sup>

The next day, McGeorge Bundy provided a shorter, less rhetorical, more concrete capsule characterization of current policy. Consistent with the reassurance Bundy gave in his late April briefing to the President in preparation for his meeting with Ambassador Bunker, he sounded a cautiously optimistic note on the army's prospects.

As you know, our policy is cool and correct with the door open to friendly relations, but we have removed the Peace Corps and other targets of Communist agitation. We are really playing for breaks in a situation in which the Communists are gaining in influence, but the prospect of a reaction by the military is strong.<sup>93</sup>

The President seemed disinclined to seize the opportunity to discuss Indonesia policy with the new ambassador and his predecessor. At their meeting on June 30, he uttered only this version of the core of Bunker's assessment: "Indonesia. Well, it won't be easy out there. Not much you can do out there."<sup>94</sup>

### **The Escalating Tensions of August and September**

President Johnson's parting words to Ambassador Green proved prophetic. For it was surely "not easy" for Green in Jakarta. Indeed, it was the ambassador's very arrival there on July 23 that helped break the nearly three-month lull in US-Indonesian relations since Bunker's April mission.<sup>95</sup> PKI and Sukarnoist activists demonstrated at the airport, at the Presidential palace when Green presented his credentials, and then at the ambassador's official residence. Ambassador Green and his Embassy country team responded with the restraint prescribed by the low posture policy. In counseling Washington to shun retaliatory

---

<sup>92</sup>"Memorandum for the President: Your Meeting with Ambassadors Jones and Green on June 30th," June 29, 1965, from James Thomson and McGeorge Bundy (James Thomson Papers, National Security Staff, 1964-1966, JFK Library).

<sup>93</sup>"Memorandum for the President: "Your Meeting with Ambassador Jones and Green," June 30, 1965, from McGeorge Bundy (NSF, Memos to President, LBJ Library).

<sup>94</sup>Thomson, who was present for this meeting, recounted the disappointment of both ambassadors with the President's apparent lack of interest in Indonesia. Interview with the author in Cambridge in January 1969. For Jones' typical counsel of restraint, see the brief notes which he prepared for the meeting with the President in Howard P. Jones Collection, Box 97, Appointment Books, 1953-1967, Archives of Hoover Institution.

<sup>95</sup>Cable from Green to State Department, July 22, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #113, LBJ Library). Embtel 121 (Djakarta), July 22, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #113, LBJ Library). Henceforth cables from the Embassy to the State Department will be termed "Embtel" and those in the other direction "Deptel." Also see on Green's arrival and other issues raised below, Ambassador Green's own recollections of the weeks leading up to the coup. These published views correspond—often in minute detail—with the views, and colorful anecdotes, expressed in interviews with the author in August 1978 and March 1981. See "Green's Oral History," pp. 22-23.

measures and even to defer innovation of emergency contingency plans, they heeded the cardinal imperative not to be stampeded into a break in diplomatic relations.<sup>96</sup>

That imperative continued to instruct the thinking of both the Embassy and Washington during August and September. With visible American targets largely reduced to the US diplomatic installations, the PKI followed up their July demonstration against Ambassador Green with attacks on the American consulates in both Surabaya and Medan as part of a militant campaign calling on Sukarno to break relations with the United States. Although Sukarno's August 17 speech did not endorse that demand, the President did deliver his most severe attack on the United States to date.<sup>97</sup> Coupled with the prospect of renewed pressure from the media and from street demonstrators on the consulates and the Embassy itself, both the Embassy and Washington were compelled by late August to reassess the Bunker policy.

#### *The Green Embassy's Late August Perspective*

Ambassador Green's late August reassessment is especially significant because it provides a gauge of American policy just forty days before the fateful abortive coup on October first. Unlike the sparsely documented Washington reviews mentioned below, Green's review is spelled out in a lengthy Embassy cable to Washington on August 23.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, this contemporary document finds corroboration in several retrospective interviews with Embassy and Washington officials in the 1965 Indonesia policy group.<sup>99</sup> In short, what follows provides a reasonably full and reliable picture of the Embassy's late August assessment and policy. As such, it speaks to the core questions of to what extent and why the Embassy remained committed to Bunker's restrained low posture guidelines.

#### *The Green Embassy in Profile*

Before analyzing the substance of Green's views, it is important to understand the dramatic changes in the profile of the American official community in Jakarta after Ambassador Jones' departure in mid-May. Especially notable were changes in numbers, composition, morale, and policy outlook. Most visible was the shrinking of the size of the community from over 400 in April to only 35 in August.<sup>100</sup> Predictably the core political elements of the country team largely survived this drastic reduction of official Americans. The CIA station maintained its staff of 12, including its full complement of 8 clandestine operatives responsible for intelligence collection and, on occasion, covert action.<sup>101</sup> Similarly the top personnel in the Embassy's political section<sup>102</sup> and the military attachés remained.<sup>103</sup> The most notable

<sup>96</sup>Embtel 188, July 31, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #117, LBJ Library).

<sup>97</sup>Embtel 353, August 17, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #129, LBJ Library).

<sup>98</sup>Embtel 403, August 23, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #130, LBJ Library).

<sup>99</sup>As noted above, I have interviewed members from all the major segments of the country team—in several instances—both in Jakarta in 1964–1965 and subsequently in the 1970s in the United States. Also see Green and Thomson oral histories cited above.

<sup>100</sup>See above, p. 48.

<sup>101</sup>The 8 operatives included those assigned to the consulates in Medan and Surabaya. The 4 non-operatives were full-time communications specialists who were responsible for all messages transmitted by the Embassy to the State Department, as well as the Station's separate channel to the CIA-DDP and CIA-DDI in Langley, Virginia. Interviews with former CIA-DDP personnel in 1977, 1981, and 1989.

<sup>102</sup>Under Ambassador Green and DCM Galbraith was the political counsellor, Edward Masters, who had direct responsibility for managing the political section of the Embassy. Like his superiors Masters had been persuaded of the low posture policy from the time of his assignment to Jakarta in 1964. Interviews with Masters and Gal-

exception was Colonel George Benson who, in June, ended his second Indonesian assignment, during which he officially served as coordinator of the civic action program assistance to the army and unofficially cultivated his long-standing personal *cum* professional relations with the top echelons of the largely American-trained senior officer corps.<sup>104</sup> Finally, and most important to the outlook and morale of the Embassy, was the combined impact of Jones' departure and Green's arrival.<sup>105</sup> Gone was the stubborn challenge Jones posed to the low posture thinking which had come to dominate his own Embassy as well as Washington. Green's arrival thus marked the final consolidation of the low posture coalition's ascendancy in the Indonesia policy group. Such strengthened consensus boosted morale in an Embassy long riven with personal suspicion, as well as policy division, in the often acrimonious final year of Ambassador Jones' tenure. During the three-month lull in US-Indonesian relations following the April Bunker Mission and Jones' departure, Deputy Chief of Mission Galbraith had established a much more cooperative and open spirit within the country team. Now in late summer Ambassador Green perpetuated that harmonious relationship with all segments of the small country team, including a CIA station once cold to its ambassador.

#### *Short Run Gloomy Prospects*

The new country team consensus behind the low posture policy is amply reflected in Green's late August reassessment. Overall, he concluded: "Although prospects for short run gloomy, there is very useful role for USG to play in Indonesia."<sup>106</sup> Worry about the coming weeks centered as always on Sukarno. Although hopeful that the President's August 17 independence day speech did not presage a break with the United States, Green warned that Sukarno had given a "clear signal" of continuing difficulties for the US.<sup>107</sup> The ambassador forecast that campaigns would be escalated against official US installations, business interests, and even missionaries. In accounting for Sukarno's hostility, Green, like Bunker, eschewed the crypto-Communist accusation made by some Embassy analysts.<sup>108</sup> He believed that not only US policy on Malaysia and Vietnam, but also deeper emotional and

---

braith in 1964–1965, Galbraith again in Washington in March 1981, and Masters again in Jakarta in September 1981.

<sup>103</sup>Colonel Willis Ethel, the senior military attaché, had begun his second tour of duty in Indonesia in 1964. Although lacking the personal charisma of his colleague Colonel George Benson, Ethel was highly regarded by his country team colleagues. Interviews with country team officials and with Ethel himself in December 1973.

<sup>104</sup>George Benson's special rapport with American-trained Indonesian army officers grew out of a long association born in the tense months of the CIA-supported regional rebellions against Sukarno and the central army in 1958. Benson's bond to Army Commander Yani was especially close, akin to that of an older brother. Interviews with Benson's colleagues in the country team, including admiring members of the CIA station. Also a number of informal interviews with Colonel Benson between 1964 and 1982. See also author's unpublished essay on US military assistance to Indonesia on deposit at the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, and Bryan Evans III, "The Influence of the United States Army on the Development of the Indonesian Army (1954–1964)," *Indonesia* 47 (April 1989): 25–48, esp. pp. 27–30.

<sup>105</sup>The disgruntlement of several political officers with Ambassador Jones' policy and modus operandi in 1964 and 1965 was well known in the Jakarta diplomatic community. In contrast, both Galbraith and Green won praise from their colleagues for building a more cohesive community. Interviews with country team officials and personal observations in Jakarta in 1964–1965.

<sup>106</sup>Embtel 403, August 23, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, #130, LBJ Library), p. 3.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup>The Embassy political officer most supportive of this view of Sukarno was "Sovietologist" Robert Martens. Interviews with Martens in 1964–1965. See also Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream*, p. 358. For a recent sampling of Martens' militant anti-communism, see Kathy Kadane, "US Officials' Lists Aided Indonesian Bloodbath in '65," *Washington Post*, May 21, 1990, p. A5.

ideological factors were driving Sukarno. "As a result of his own complexes, Marxist political views and suspicions arising from 1958 events and later, Sukarno has clearly identified U.S. as enemy."<sup>109</sup>

Given his assessment of the multiple and deep roots of Sukarno's antipathy to the United States, Green echoed Bunker's estimate that "we probably cannot have much direct impact on Indonesia policy making through normal diplomatic exchange as long as Sukarno is in control."<sup>110</sup> Perhaps even more sobering was Green's prediction that "no Indonesians influential in the governing processes are likely to stand up to Sukarno even if he should push relations with us to the breaking point." Green left no doubt that he referred not only to certain moderate politicians close to the United States, but also to the Indonesian military. "We also cannot realistically expect to have decisive influence on other power groups, such as the military, although it is important we maintain contact with them."

Green's assessment of the limits of US influence over the short term reflected the professed inability of the Embassy's top leadership to identify any feasible means—covert or overt—by which the United States could check the leftward drift of events.<sup>111</sup> The ambassador, the DCM, the political counselor, the military attachés, and the two top CIA station agents caucused frequently during the troubled summer months. They canvassed the whole spectrum of hypothetical options.

Although US government censors continue to deny scholars access to documented evidence of what forms of covert action were contemplated and implemented in 1965, it is clear, that at least some members of the country team council had no moral inhibitions about employing violence if they felt this would help Indonesia "save itself" from the political and moral evil of communism. At least two former officials from the country team replied positively when asked hypothetically whether they were prepared to sacrifice even their close army allies for the sake of defeating the PKI.<sup>112</sup> The highly ideological "just war" mentality within the Embassy helps to explain why Robert Martens, an Embassy political officer, readily supplied the army with a list of members of PKI organizations with the intent of assisting in the capture and or killing of those individuals in the bloody weeks of repression following the October 1 coup.<sup>113</sup>

#### *The Green Policy Recommendations*

The gloomy short-term prospect did not, however, preclude Green's conclusion that there was still "a very useful role for the U.S. to play in Indonesia."<sup>114</sup> Urging, like Bunker, that "we basically aim at the post-Sukarno period," Green stipulated some of the things "we can and should do as long as we can stay here with dignity. . . ."<sup>115</sup> First on the short and cryptic list of these steps was to: "maintain whatever contact possible with the military and

<sup>109</sup>Embtel 403, August 23, 1965, pp. 2–3.

<sup>110</sup>All quotes in this paragraph are from *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup>Again in interviews with the author officials from all the sectors of the country team concurred on both the intensity of their search and their frustration in not finding a way out of their dilemma. These interviews included two former officials involved with both the Jakarta Station and DDP-FE in Washington during the years 1960–1966.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.* For confirmation on the existence of the de facto executive council within the country team, see Brands, "Limits of Manipulation," p. 788, footnote 3.

<sup>113</sup>See recent article by Kathy Kadane in *Washington Post*, May 21, 1990.

<sup>114</sup>Embtel 403, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*



other elements in the power structure, looking toward the post-Sukarno period."<sup>116</sup> Implicit here, as contemporary sources confirm,<sup>117</sup> was the long-standing American calculation and hope that, once Sukarno was incapacitated, the anti-Communist army would finally confront the PKI and prevail. The form of that clash remained beyond prediction, but the country team had new intelligence that the timing might be sooner than had been assumed in the spring.<sup>118</sup> From this more hopeful long-term perspective, it became even more imperative to use the short term to nurture the political and personal relations with the army leadership developed by military attachés, such as Major George Benson and Colonel Willis Ethel, and the Jakarta station since 1958. Although overt material assistance to the armed forces had ended, with the exception of the still politically stalemated telecommunications project, the option of covert assistance to the army both in the short and long term depended on preventing a complete rupture of contact with the military within Indonesia.

Thus, the second of Green's prescriptions was the cardinal imperative of avoiding a break in diplomatic relations with the Sukarno government. Such a break would not only exacerbate the already dismal short-term situation, but it could delay and complicate the US role in the immediate post-Sukarno period. Moreover, the United States would forfeit other valuable short-term opportunities noted by Green. These included: "continuing useful political, economic, and especially intelligence reporting . . ."; "identifying Indonesia's maneuvers and aspirations" to third world nations; "getting some objective news reporting into Indonesia through VOA, Embassy news bulletins, and other means . . . as reassurance to Indonesia's 'moderates'."<sup>119</sup>

Preserving army contacts and maintaining diplomatic relations inevitably entailed revisiting the perennial question of how to deal with the hostile and volatile Sukarno. Green recommended that the US "attempt dialogue with Sukarno,"<sup>120</sup> but registered the characteristic skepticism about "how productive" such a dialogue would be. He revealed some sympathy for the tougher stance toward Sukarno typically exhibited by Secretary Rusk.

As I see it, we need, by trial and error, to find the correct balance of carrot and stick. Petulance or overreaction by the US would probably drive Sukarno to extremes. Under reaction on our part makes us look foolish to our friends abroad and to some Indonesians. . . .<sup>121</sup>

In the end, however, Green opted, with the support of his country team, for sticking with the low posture priority on the long-term stakes. That meant not allowing emotion, or even principle, to hinder the hopeful, but uncertain, political prospects of the Indonesian army. That was the least and probably the most that American diplomacy could achieve in the face of the frustrating limits on American leverage over Indonesian politics in late summer 1965.

Green's cables do not spell out the basis for his implied cautious optimism about the longer term prospects for Indonesia—what he called "the post-Sukarno period." From interviews with members of the country team, however, it appears that while uncertainty

---

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>See note 18 above.

<sup>118</sup>See below p. 55.

<sup>119</sup>Embtel 403, p. 3.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid. After surveying the ruins of the Indian Embassy following an attack by demonstrators in late August, Green gave Foreign Minister Subandrio "an ultimatum" on protecting security of US citizens and installations. See "Green Oral History," p. 26.

and worry dominated their attitude at the time, this was still mingled with the expectation that the army would eventually block PKI accession to power.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, CIA station reports on Sukarno's health,<sup>123</sup> that crucial imponderable in Indonesian politics, must have kindled hope in the country team in Jakarta, just as it did inside the administration in Washington, that the long-anticipated and desired showdown between the army and the PKI was at last on the horizon.

*The White House Late Summer Perspective*

In their later summer memoranda to their boss, McGeorge Bundy, NSC Asian staffers James Thomson and Chester Cooper echoed Ambassador Green in reaffirming their commitment to low posture.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, their memos conveyed the range of other concerns that crowded their agenda in late August and early September: the ever-present Vietnam war;<sup>125</sup> the repercussions of the unexpected secession of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia;<sup>126</sup> the frustrating Congressional impediments to providing promised telecommunications equipment to the army;<sup>127</sup> and most of all the ongoing battle to defend low posture policy not only from anti-American demonstrations in Jakarta, but from critics in Washington, angry at Sukarno and frustrated by the impotence of the United States. The first reported State Department high-level policy review since the March crisis produced this comment on September 10:

. . . George Ball has stimulated a new State effort at the old question of Whither Indonesia?, and this can be educational for all hands as well as putting the brake on any 7th floor tendency toward impulsive action. Thomson is keeping his nose under this tent.<sup>128</sup>

While not mentioned in their declassified reports to McGeorge Bundy, Thomson and Cooper had found a broad interagency consensus for low posture in another policy review held sometime in mid to late August.<sup>129</sup> Convened at Cooper's initiative in response to the public boast by a Sukarno cabinet member that Indonesia would soon conduct an atomic test,<sup>130</sup> this meeting in fact addressed broader questions. The depressing consensus

<sup>122</sup>See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>123</sup>For Sukarno's unpublicized public collapse on August 4, see Crouch, *Army and Politics*, pp. 109–10. Also see below.

<sup>124</sup>See, for instance, "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy: The Asian Week," from Thomson, Ropa, and Cooper, August 23, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library), pp. 4–5.

<sup>125</sup>Indonesia usually rated only a paragraph or two in the five- to ten-page weekly reports of the NSC Asian staff to the President's National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, because of the omnivorous issue of Vietnam.

<sup>126</sup>See above cited "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy," August 23, 1965, p.5. For analysis of the Singapore secession, see Mackie, *Konfrontasi*, pp. 292–97.

<sup>127</sup>Congress, together with the British Foreign Office, placed so many restrictions on the deal that the Indonesian army finally rejected it. As Thomson told Bundy on September 10: "One old irritant is now dead and buried. . . ." See "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy: Asian Week," from Thomson, September 10, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library), p. 4. Happily for the Administration the political charge of "losing Indonesia to Communism" was raised only momentarily in the pre-coup period by Richard Nixon in a press conference in Australia in the course of an Asian trip. See *New York Times*, September 7, 1965.

<sup>128</sup>See above cited "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy," September 10, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup>Interviews with NSC staffer Chester Cooper in spring 1970 and again in spring 1981 in Washington. Cooper remembered the substance reported below, but could not be precise about the date in August.

<sup>130</sup>Embtel 168, July 29, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #114, LBJ Library).

endorsed by all participants—including those from CIA-DDP—was that the United States had no means of forestalling the probability of “a basically communist Indonesia.”<sup>131</sup>

*The Mid-September Consulate Crisis and  
the “Good News” about Sukarno’s Health*

By mid-September, the volatile Indonesian front had erupted again, and Washington policy makers were faced with the question of whether to close down the American consulate in Surabaya. Consul McClean’s graphic accounts<sup>132</sup> of the physical and psychological harassments by the PKI demonstrators excited alarm in Washington for the safety of American personnel. Thomson himself seemed to acknowledge that prudence dictated preparation of contingency plans for closing the Surabaya consulate.

Thomson talked at some length with Indonesia planners from State and the Agency. Despite Subandrio’s flat assurances to Green regarding protection of American lives and property, evidence mounts that we may be in for even rougher days ahead. The present focus is our Consulate at Surabaya; we have begun a quiet removal of the dependents there. State is inclined toward a complete close-down if we have further Surabaya incidents.<sup>133</sup>

Having addressed the immediate tactical issues of the consulate crisis, Thomson spoke to the longer-term issues of “Whither Indonesia” which lay at the heart of the late August Washington policy reviews:

Meanwhile, we hear rumblings of intensified PKI plans to force a show-down with the U.S. The tired old issue here remains the one between the stick-to-it boys on the one hand (playing for the long-term stakes, which may be closer at hand given new reports on Sukarno’s declining health) and the teach-them-a-lesson boys.<sup>134</sup>

Significantly, Thomson’s confidence in low posture had strengthened precisely because the long-term stakes “may be closer at hand given new reports on Sukarno’s declining health.” These included an intelligence cable on August 27, which concluded:

According to some of the Presidential aides attending the meeting, in the last days of July 1965 President Sukarno became quite ill. The exact nature of his illness was not announced but it is believed by those close to the President that his body has reached the limit of its endurance in combat with a kidney condition and that his general health is now in a state of rapid deterioration. Sukarno has been told that his life can be prolonged only if he becomes completely inactive. This he has refused to do and there is fear that he may die in the very near future.<sup>135</sup>

The justification for sticking to restraint in the face of Sukarno and the PKI moving Indonesia to the left rested now in part on the new hope that fate would, indeed, remove

<sup>131</sup>Interviews with Chester Cooper in Washington in spring of 1970 and spring of 1981. Also CIA-authorized interview in spring of 1978 with Joseph Smith, deputy director of DDP-FE in 1965.

<sup>132</sup>Embtel Surabaya 88 and 89; September 12 and 13, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #151 and 152, LBJ Library).

<sup>133</sup>“Memorandum to Mr. Bundy: The Asian Week,” from James Thomson, September 10, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library) p. 4.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>CIA, “Intelligence Information Cable: Decision to Cancel . . .,” August 27, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #161, LBJ Library), pp. 1–2. Although the experienced analysts in Washington had grown as skeptical of reports of Sukarno’s health as they had of coup plots, it appears that the Embassy and Washington had reason to credit this

Sukarno before the PKI had consolidated its still very limited beachhead inside the government.<sup>136</sup> As Bunker and Green recognized, Sukarno constituted a formidable political and psychological barrier to the army's reacting to the PKI's political advance. Although still cautiously optimistic that the army would prevail in a direct confrontation with the PKI, the American advocates of US patience and restraint agreed with their critics that the longer Sukarno remained the lower the chances of the army's prevailing. It now appeared in early September that fate would reward the stubborn defenders of what Thomson described as "playing for the long term stakes."<sup>137</sup>

In mid-September, new attacks on the US consulate forced Thomson to focus again on the depressing short-term prospect: "The going here is rough and will probably get rougher."<sup>138</sup> Despite Foreign Minister Subandrio's assurances of protection for American lives and property, the embassy remained skeptical. Meanwhile, the PKI pressed its anti-American offensive. Thomson, however, remained unshaken in his advocacy of patience. Anxious to reassure Bundy, Thomson on September 14 pointedly confirmed the earlier reports of Sukarno's deteriorating health.

. . . Foreign Minister Subandrio has now given Ambassador Green such assurances; but we remain skeptical, and the Indo Communist Party may well be mounting a new offensive to force us out of our two consulates (and eventually out of the country altogether). An Indo-US break would be a major victory for the Communists; relations are far harder to re-open than to break. But the Indo Government may hold the key.

Our main objective remains to ride out the long storm with battened hatches (reduced diplomatic staffing) in an effort to play for the long-term post-Sukarno stakes. (We have solid new reports of Sukarno's deteriorating health.)<sup>139</sup>

What riding out the long storm meant in mid-September emerges from a closer look at several strands in the frayed American-Indonesian relationships. For the Administration, as the Thomson-Cooper reports to Bundy demonstrated, top priority in Washington was still to contain the impulse to panic over the attacks on the consulates. In Indonesia the Embassy sought to bolster the army's morale despite disappointment over Washington's stalling on the telecommunications equipment. And, concurrently, both the Embassy and Washington sought to formulate contingency plans geared to a range of scenarios.

The embassy's recommendation not to close the Surabaya consulate forced Washington policy makers to ponder again a cruel choice. For Secretary of State Rusk, and presumably others on "the seventh floor of State," the issue was first the safety of American lives and

---

particular one not only because of the station certification of the past reliability of the source, but because of the other reports cited in other documents.

<sup>136</sup>See Crouch, *Army and Politics*, pp. 95, 108. The PKI's dependence on Sukarno had long been a source of debate within the party itself. Younger, more militant cadre resented the Jakarta life-style that binding to Sukarno entailed. Interview with a then recently released ex-PKI official in the fall of 1981 in Jakarta.

<sup>137</sup>"Memo to Mr. Bundy: The Asian Week," from James Thomson, September 10, 1965, p. 4. It is perhaps significant that Thomson did not cite here the uncorroborated claim of a source close to the CIA station that they had by late August secured a "highly reliable" intelligence field report that at least some PKI leaders were plotting with Sukarnoist junior officers to preempt a widely rumored coup by the army's "Council of Generals" (interviews with the author in July 1989). The intelligence report in question does not appear in the meagre sample of declassified CIA field reports in the National Security File in the LBJ Library. Not surprisingly the CIA's own published report on the coup does not discuss or cite any American documents, actions, or perceptions.

<sup>138</sup>"Memorandum for the President: Developments in the Far East," from James Thomson, September 14, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library), p. 2.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*

property. Perhaps equally compelling for the Secretary was the legal *cum* moral principle of the rights of legation.<sup>140</sup> Bolstering both these shibboliths was the prudent interest of a great power to deter other anti-American forces in the volatile Third World from attacking American installations and personnel. Compounding Rusk's outrage at Indonesian Government endangerment of American lives was the frequency of such incidents over the previous year.

Thomson, however, wrote to McGeorge Bundy on September 16 decrying the Secretary's position.<sup>141</sup> In a forceful appeal for the classic "realism" appropriate to a mature great power, Thomson held up the British behavior as an example. Consistent with overall British policy, even after the burning of its Jakarta Embassy in September 1963, the United Kingdom had elected to preserve its legation—with the attendant advantages of access to Indonesian officials, opportunities for intelligence, and the prospect of being available to monitor and possibly assist in the anticipated showdown between the army and the PKI.

The CIA's Washington-based DDI analysts on Indonesia joined Thomson's frontal attack on the Secretary's position.<sup>142</sup> The CIA-DDI memorandum of September 13 also invoked the British experience to bolster the contention that the Indonesian demonstrators had consistently shown solicitude for the physical safety of foreign diplomats even amid violent attacks on legation buildings. Moreover, the CIA questioned the political calculation that a tough US response in the Surabaya case would deter further attacks on the US consulate in Medan. Committed to pressing their offensive and cognizant of the US interest in avoiding a break in relations, both President Sukarno and the PKI would not be influenced by the closing of a US consulate. Finally, though unspoken in the CIA memo, was the institutional stake that the CIA had in preserving what Thomson called "a listening post." Washington greatly valued its Jakarta station with its extensive Indonesian assets not only for monitoring Indonesia but the Soviet Union's overseas activities. There was also the need to protect the CIA's covert activities under way in Indonesia, which though apparently limited, contributed modestly to US support for anti-Communist forces. If a coup by the Generals' Council was actually being planned, it was, of course, very important not to withdraw the Embassy and consulate cover provided to the CIA station, and if the PKI was to be provoked into a risky preemptive action, it was important not to diminish the credibility of the long rumored CIA-generals coup plot by withdrawing the CIA from a part of Indonesia.<sup>143</sup>

Clearly the Administration's decision to reject Secretary Rusk's preference for principle and punishment was in part because of the political skills and cogent arguments of the low posture advocates—led in this instance by the White House staff and the CIA-DDI, but actively supported by both Ambassador Green and the Department's FE experts. That victory in the executive branch politics in Washington complemented the more tenuous

<sup>140</sup>For Thomson's view of Rusk, see "Thomson Oral History," p. 40.

<sup>141</sup>"Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy: Some Dangers Inherent in the Diplomacy of Pique," from James Thomson, September 16, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library).

<sup>142</sup>"Unsigned Memo: Possible Closure of U.S. Consulate in Surabaya," September 13, 1965 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library). This memo appears in Thomson Papers as an attachment to the Thomson memo to Bundy quoted above. Its CIA-DDI authorship is established by several indicators including the fact that the CIA had to determine its declassification, while the CIA was not involved in declassifying the Thomson NSC memos. Nonetheless, it appears in the LBJ Library as a State Department document in NSF, Indonesia, Vol. 4, #192.

<sup>143</sup>This particular point is conjecture on my part, but an interview in May 1982 with retired Japanese Ambassador Kai, who served in Malaysia in 1965, stressed the overall importance of psychological warfare in the strategy of both the Malaysian government and the Indonesian army.

Embassy efforts to encourage the Indonesian army in Jakarta. Both were necessary preconditions for the success of Washington's high risk policy of "letting Indonesia save itself."

The American calculation, as Bundy bluntly put it to the President in June, had been that "although the PKI is gaining in influence, the prospect of a reaction by the military is strong." Still the question had persisted about the timing and circumstances of the expected eventual military reaction. Even after the swift and massive character of the military reaction to the abortive coup of September 30, the question of the timing and circumstances of the military reaction remained. The paucity of relevant documentary evidence obstructs any final answer about the intentions of the general staff on the eve of the coup. And that question impinges on the equally inaccessible issues of the nature and effectiveness of the CIA station's implementation of the Bunker-Green-Thomson low posture strategy imperative of "maintaining close contact with the Indonesian army." Appropriately a "sanitized" CIA station field report provides a provocative final glimpse at these intertwined issues of army politics and the US low posture policy—both its overt and covert dimensions:

On 1 October 1965 the Indonesian Embassy in Bonn learned that on 30 September, the chiefs of the Indonesian general staff, including generals Yani, Parman, Subrato [*sic*], ARdahani [*sic*], and others met in Djakarta to decide what to do in the event President Sukarno was incapacitated. At the time of the meeting, Sukarno was reportedly very sick. The attempted revolt occurred before any decision could be reached.<sup>144</sup>

#### **Epilogue: Post-Coup White House Policy Assessments, Goals, Strategies**

White House memoranda on Indonesia in the months immediately following the abortive September 30 movement provide further insight into the pre-coup policy, as well as the character of the post-coup assessments and policy responses. Most predictable and most persistent is the sense of relief and elation at the army's relentless suppression of the PKI through the fall of 1965. This repression fulfilled the most cherished goal of the long frustrated US Indonesia policy group. Moreover, to the frank surprise of many US officials, the army leadership showed persistence and subtlety in defying President Sukarno's insistence on protecting the PKI. The trauma of the September 30 killings of members of the general staff had finally achieved what neither PKI political advances nor urgent prodding by US officials could achieve. The army had finally stood up to Sukarno—and on the cardinal issue of the PKI. In short, the army, aided by the often savage militancy of Islamic groups, had, indeed, "saved itself" as Ambassador Bunker had asserted it could and would in his April report, and in fact gone much further. Although aware of the remaining questions about the character and capacity of the victorious army to lead Indonesia out of the political turmoil of 1965, the White House Asian staff's year-end assessment confidently asserts the permanence of the decisive political changes. Contained in Thomson's weekly secret memorandum to his boss McGeorge Bundy, this candid internal White House communication of January 7, 1966, provides what may be the most convincing available documentary evidence of the reality, as well as the retrospective US perception, of the American response to Sukarno's radicalization of Indonesia in 1965.

The great bonus of 1965 and the great question of 1966 is the shape of the Indonesian revolution. Our undeserved accident of September 30th has unleashed some slow

<sup>144</sup>Unsigned CIA field report: "Indication of Sukarno's Critical Ill Health," October 2, 1965, National Security File, Indonesia Vol. 5, #176, LBJ Library. The sanitization appears to have not only eliminated all identification of the source but as much as a paragraph of content. (Like so much of the incompletely declassified CIA archives, this report raises many questions.)

motion but decisive changes that have permanently altered Indonesia's political face.\_\_\_\_

---



---



---

145

In any event, the PKI is dead in any recognizable form, and Sukarno is apparently doomed—though his waning period may be prolonged for some time to come.<sup>146</sup>

While celebrating the demise of the PKI and the eclipse of Sukarno, the year-end assessment resists the temptation to take credit for producing these miraculous gains. Consistent with the cardinal tenets of the Bunker recommendations this formulation recognizes the limits of American power even to predict, let alone manipulate, the course of Indonesia's struggle for power in the pre-coup period. There was always the cautious confidence that the army could and would prevail in a post-Sukarno showdown with the PKI, but the form and timing of such a showdown could not be predicted. With respect to overt policy, all that was certain in the eyes of the Administration was that the US should reduce its visibility, avoid punitive actions, and sustain its links with the army and civilian moderates.

These core elements of the low posture policy, born of a keen sense of the limits of US power and the political dangers to the army of overt association with the United States, continued to mark US policy during the first months after the abortive coup.<sup>147</sup> As in the pre-coup period, this policy depended on maintaining the clandestine functions of the CIA station both for intelligence collection and for a range of still largely classified covert activities.<sup>148</sup> We do know that all contacts between the Embassy and the army leaders until early November were conducted covertly by veteran military attaché, Colonel Willis Ethel, and the deputy chief of the CIA station, Joe Lazarsky.<sup>149</sup> There is also strong circumstantial evidence that the CIA contributed to the highly effective army media campaign to demonize the PKI as the perpetrators of the bloody abortive coup.<sup>150</sup> Former Ambassador Green himself has testified to the supplying of walkie talkies.<sup>151</sup> The most fully documented instance of US covert material assistance to the army in the period following the coup occurred in early November 1965 when Washington authorized the CIA station in Bangkok to meet General Sukendro's request on behalf of army leaders Suharto and Nasution, for medicines, communications equipment, and small arms.<sup>152</sup> Although the amount involved

<sup>145</sup>Note: Blanks show lines deleted by censor over my Freedom of Information Act appeal.

<sup>146</sup>"Memorandum for Mr. Bundy: The New Year in Asia," from James Thomson and D. W. Ropa, January 7, 1966 (Thomson Papers, Kennedy Library), pp. 11–12.

<sup>147</sup>For more extensive discussion of both overt and covert US policy in the months immediately following the abortive coup, see Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, especially pp.178–83, and Brands, "Limits of Manipulation," pp. 801–8. For provocative articles centered on covert action, see other authors cited in footnote 20 above.

<sup>148</sup>See all sources cited in footnote 20 above, especially the recent investigative reporting by Kathy Kadane. For some debate between former CIA station chief Hugh Tovar and CIA critics, see Daniel Moynihan, et.al., "Should the US Fight Secret Wars?" *Harpers* 269 (September 1984): 33–47. Also see subsequent letters from Edward Ingraham and Hugh Tovar, *Harpers* 269 (December 1984): 4–5, 73–76.

<sup>149</sup>Interview with Ethel in 1970 and with Lazarsky in 1989.

<sup>150</sup>See Ralph McGehee, "The CIA and the White Paper on El Salvador," *Nation*, April 11, 1981.

<sup>151</sup>See "Green's Oral History," p. 26.

<sup>152</sup>Embtel 920, November 5, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol.5, #[obscured], LBJ Library). In interviews with the author in 1981–1982, General Sukendro confirmed that all three types of covert assistance had been provided through the Bangkok CIA station. Sukendro's close association with the CIA is nicely illustrated by his visit to the Kuala Lumpur CIA station before his return to Jakarta from a ceremonial visit to Peking cut short by the October 1 coup attempt.

is believed to have been modest, this transaction points up several dimensions of the character of US policy in the post-coup period. Supplying such assistance at this time gave concrete reinforcement to the verbal expressions of support just given to army leaders in Jakarta by the US Embassy. On November 4, for example—well after the massacre had begun—Deputy Chief of Mission Galbraith, in one of the very first high-level Embassy contacts with an emissary of the top Indonesian military, “made clear that the embassy and the U.S.G. were generally sympathetic with and admiring of what the army was doing.”<sup>153</sup> General Sukendro’s request for covert arms assistance left no doubt as to what the army was doing. The weapons were “to arm Moslem and nationalist youth in Central Java for use against the PKI . . .” in the context of the overall army policy “to eliminate the PKI.”<sup>154</sup>

Washington’s policy toward Indonesia in 1965, then, exhibited not only a generally astute sense of the limits of American power, but also a taste for covert action and an insensitivity to professed American moral standards. Consistent efforts to accelerate and fuel the long-anticipated showdown between the army and the PKI do not, however, establish the US as a prime instigator of either the abortive coup or the Indonesian massacres in the fall of 1965. For whatever the still undisclosed facts about the extent of covert US support for the army-orchestrated campaign to “eliminate the PKI,” it is clear that indigenous Indonesian political and social forces, together with accidental factors, were the prime determinants of the watershed events of Indonesian politics in 1965. Though not a prime instigator of those tragic events, the United States was, however, surely an important and witting accomplice.

At the very least American policy makers must acknowledge responsibility for words spoken in diplomatic channels in support of “destruction of the Communist party” and words unspoken publicly about human slaughter. At the time only one major American official had the political courage to dispute publicly the calculus of geo-political interests and cold war ideology that informed American actions at that time. In January 1966, Robert Kennedy, who had undertaken two notable Presidential assignments in Indonesia in the early 1960s, allowed conscience and candor to override the contemporary official orthodoxy: “We have spoken out against inhuman slaughters perpetrated by the Nazis and the Communists. But will we speak out also against the inhuman slaughter in Indonesia, where over 100,000 alleged Communists have been not perpetrators, but victims?”<sup>155</sup> Now in the post-cold-war era of glasnost are we finally ready to meet Kennedy’s challenge?

---

<sup>153</sup>Embtel 1326, November 4, 1965 (NSF, Indonesia, Vol.5, #137, LBJ Library).

<sup>154</sup>See Embtel 920, November 5, 1965, cited above.

<sup>155</sup>Cited in Arthur Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 790.